

## **A time to wash your face and facial cleaning**

Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21

### **We wear masks**

Each person has their own end of day rituals. It could be praying or reading a relaxing book or checking 'to-do lists' for tomorrow. Juhee, my wife, has her own end of day ritual, which is removing makeup and washing her face. After a long day, Juhee is sometimes so exhausted she just wants to go to sleep but she knows she must scrub and toil first before she goes to bed.

Although I don't wear makeup, I can understand that removing makeup is not a fun thing to do every day. If you don't regularly remove makeup before going to bed, some bad things can happen. You may have eye irritation, blackheads and pimples on your face, and your skin will age faster. How do I know all this? I googled it and some experts say so.

The same thing can apply to our spiritual life. If we do not regularly remove the makeup we wear, whatever that is, our souls will wither and forget who we really are.

While most men do not wear facial makeup, we all wear makeup or masks.

Our masks can be our roles in the society. Teachers, nurses, drivers, pastors, mothers, fathers and etc[옛-‘쎄터라].

Other people's expectations of us can also be a mask we wear. For instance, a pastor is expected to be gentle, nice, caring, and smiling all the times. So many pastors often hide their emotional turmoil, depression, and anxiety from their congregations. They try to show their best version of themselves to their church members. However, when they hide and ignore their inner-struggles and the suffering of their souls, their lives gradually crumble and in extreme cases, a pastor may take his own life.

We are living in the age of social media. People use Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and many other forms of social media. Our appearance and image have become very important, especially for young people. People post nice pictures of what they eat, where they go and what they do.

But those images are not who they really are or what their real life looks like. People wear masks and many people today confuse their masks with their deepest selves.

We, Christians, have to admit that we also wear masks. Our church tries to update what we are doing every week on our Facebook page and as you know, we tend to show one of the best parts of our church, the choir or smiling people at coffee hours. What we don't want to show are our empty pews or the ugly internal conflict the United Methodist Church is now going through. Just like everyone else, we, Christians, are also very good with wearing masks.

But actions speak louder than words. People know when our words of claiming to have Christian beliefs and moral standards do not cohere with our own behaviors. People call those people whose words and actions are inconsistent with each other, hypocrites.

One day a pastor met a wandering member on the street and they stopped to talk.

"I never go to church," the wandering member boasted. "Perhaps you have noticed that pastor?"

"Yes, I have noticed that," said the pastor.

"Well, the reason I don't go to the church is because there are so many hypocrites there."

The pastor replied with a smile, saying, "Oh, don't let that keep you away! "There's always room for one more."

This is a sarcastic joke but this also reflects the widespread perception toward the church today. According to a poll, a majority of adults who don't attend church say church is full of hypocrites.<sup>1</sup>

A dangerous pitfall for many Christians is that we are prone to make even our religious devotion and spiritual practices our masks. Many Christians wear religious masks to feel good about themselves while hiding their withered souls and broken spirits. Jesus knew the danger of hypocrisy for religiously pious people so he warned his disciples, “Beware of the yeast [ϙ] – 스트] of the Pharisees—their hypocrisy.” Pharisees had made their religious devotions and practices as their nice-looking masks for themselves.

But “Our spirituality is what we do when we think no one is looking.” When no one is looking, when we are in secret, our true character and our true spiritual conditions are revealed.

In fact, our appearance and reputation before people are not an integral part of our spirituality. So Jesus told people to do their spiritual practices, fasting, and alms-giving in secret and “your Father who see in secret will reward you.” In other words, Jesus urged people to remove their masks and stand honestly before God.

### **Remove your mask and stand honestly before God**

Think of who you are if you remove your job title, social status, relationships, reputation, achievements and possessions. Can you still describe yourself well after removing all this nice-good-looking makeup? Do you know who you really are? It’s hard to answer.

I have been thinking about this question of who you are. My first answer was ‘a pastor’ but being a pastor is my role and my job, not myself. The second answer was a husband. But it is also my role within my family, but not myself. Rev. is a just a title that I have achieved but that title is not who I am. Knowing who I am after removing all masks is really challenging. This means that we have been often confusing ourselves with our masks.

How can we stand honestly before God without wearing makeup and masks? More importantly, how can we remove the makeup and masks we wear?

I am not a cosmetics sales representative but I can tell you that the best makeup remover for our souls is the ash we will impose on our foreheads this evening.

Ash is a sign of our mortality. I am not a prophet, but I can tell you what will happen in the future. “We are all going to die one day.” This is the truth. Rich people on Wall Street and poor people in slums, powerful people in Washington D.C. and powerless Central America refugees at the border, a nice-looking famous Hollywood actress and a plain-looking peasant girl, an honorable Rev. Dr. and nameless atheist... we are all going to die one day. After we die, our body will return to dust. “Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return.” This is a most simple and powerful truth that removes our masks and helps us see who we really are.

As we confront our own mortality, we also have to admit our sinfulness and brokenness. No one is perfect though we try to be. We may have hurt someone intentionally or unintentionally. We may have been hurt by someone whom we dearly love and that scar on our heart has become a thorn causing us to hurt someone we love in return. We have to admit the fact that we are all broken in some way and we need help. Honestly facing our sins and brokenness is difficult but, my friends, this is also a blessing of God.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.tuscaloosaneews.com/article/20080119/News/606100924>

Hemingway says, "We are all broken...that's how the light get in." If we confess our sins and accept our brokenness before God, "our God who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness." (1 John 1:9)

Don't hide your tears and suffering behind a smiling mask. Don't hide your brokenness and sinfulness behind a religious mask. Remember that you are dust and to dust you shall return. Remove your mask and stand honestly before God. God will wipe away your tears, and tend the deepest wounds in your hearts. God will forgive us and cleanse us from our sins and tell us, "You are mine."

This is how the light of life gets in to our lives! Remove your masks and let the divine light gets in! Amen.